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TAGS: [MARR](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [NATO](#) [EN](#)  
SUBJECT: Estonian Defense Minister Welcomes Increased NATO  
visibility; Estonian Commitment to Afghanistan Remains High

CLASSIFIED BY: HILTONJA, Pol/Mil, DoS, Tallinn; REASON: 1.4(A), (D)

(C) SUMMARY: On January 28, in a meeting with the Ambassador, Minister of Defense Jaak Aaviksoo expressed his appreciation for recent U.S. and NATO efforts to boost support for Estonia. This visible support from the U.S. "makes it easier for the GOE to maintain nine percent of its military operations in Afghanistan." Minister Aaviksoo is optimistic that Swedish and Finnish interest in joining NATO is real. He has no doubts about NATO's commitment to Article V and considers those who doubt this commitment are missing the "real security concerns," such as energy security and managing the decline of Russia. While his political ambitions have faced a setback following his party's recent congress, Aaviksoo has pledged his continued support to the current coalition with the Reform Party and to the IRL campaign strategy for the March 2011 parliamentary elections. END SUMMARY.

NATO visibility in Estonia Helps GoE Maintain International  
Commitments

(C/NF) Aaviksoo considers 2010 to be off to a good start with a very welcome boost from USG 1206 funding for replacing worn-out mortars and gaining UAV capability. He also welcomes the increasing visibility and complexity of air policing and other NATO-related exercises and training in Estonia. Aaviksoo added that these developments will help the government to maintain the domestic political support necessary so that Estonia can continue to meet its commitments to its strategic partners. (NOTE: Parliament has approved a maximum deployment of 170 soldiers to Afghanistan through December 2010. ESTCOY-9, currently participating in Operation Mushtarak in Helmand Province, numbers approximately 160 personnel. Aaviksoo personally has promised to maximize the level of deployed troops with the addition of smaller units such as HUMINT, SOF and IED disposal teams. Considering that the Estonian land forces are comprised of 1,950 active duty volunteers, this equals a deployment ratio of approximately nine percent. The MoD also recently announced their intention to once again send a civilian advisor to the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan, and they will soon boost their contribution to the EU Police Mission by one, and possible two, police trainers (reftel). Many within the GOE ask for more opportunities to deploy with U.S. forces, but with the small size of the Estonian military, the GOE lacks the forces to make this practical. END NOTE.)

MoD Optimistic about Nordic Neighbors' Interest in NATO

(C) Aaviksoo espoused optimism about Sweden and Finland joining NATO, noting that, "It takes time for our Nordic partners to move, but there is a lot more interest than can actually be shown." Aaviksoo added that the Finnish Ministry of Defense is very supportive of NATO membership. (NOTE: Sweden and Finland are already very active supporters of NATO's Cooperative Cyber Defense Center of Excellence and are likely to soon complete formal agreements to become cooperative partners. END NOTE.)

#### Managing the Decline of Russia Will be Big Challenge for NATO

(U) Aaviksoo has a nuanced understanding of Russia, cautioning that countries like Estonia cannot ignore the threat posed by Russia, while acknowledging that the real challenge for NATO will be managing a declining Russia. He added that even minimal progress on an agreement on mutual threats between NATO and Russia will help take the initiative away from anti-NATO interests in Russia. Aaviksoo noted optimistically that, even though the Kremlin has not properly assessed the threats to Russia, he believes Russian intellectuals are developing a proper understanding of the wide array of threats facing Russia including, negative demographic trends, deteriorating infrastructure, instability on its southern border, and the increasing strength of organized crime.

#### No Question about NATO's Article V Commitment, Energy Security Bigger Concern

(C/NF) Aaviksoo does not question NATO's commitment to Article 5. Aaviksoo does lament the seeming lack of interest by many Western European countries in such critical issues as energy security. Aaviksoo also believes European monopoly policy is misguided when it targets firms such as Microsoft, and there is a real need for a monopoly policy "with teeth" that is not afraid to take on Gazprom.

#### Political Ambitions Thwarted, but Committed to Coalition and Estonian Interests

(U) Aaviksoo is secure in his tenure as Defense Minister, and is highly respected. He does, however, have domestic political ambitions, which took a hit during the recent party convention of the Isamaa ja Res Publica Liit (IRL), when former two-time Prime Minister and current MP Mart Laar secured reelection as Party Chairman. Aaviksoo was not reelected as one of the three Deputy Chairs, losing his position to current Minister of Economy and Communications (and ardent Laar supporter) Juhan Parts. In public statements following the convention, Aaviksoo reaffirmed his commitment to the GoE and the Ministry of Defense, and also pledged his support to IRL's goal of securing 30 seats in the upcoming parliamentary elections. Throughout the convention and in his follow-up remarks, Aaviksoo expressed his hope that IRL's policies will become more socially oriented.

(C) COMMENT. Aaviksoo is an intelligent, bold and forward-looking minister committed to a greater role for his country. Estonia only has a small number of troops in Afghanistan in absolute terms, but Estonia has only a very small military and nevertheless, is one of the few countries in the region nearing its target of spending two percent of GDP on defense, even during the current economic

downturn. Moreover, Estonian troops operate in Afghanistan without caveats. Estonians frequently offer to increase their deployments, particularly with U.S. forces, but they simply lack experienced, sustainable cadres of forces. The will to deploy is certainly present, but the means are unfortunately lacking. U.S. support to Estonia, particularly through IMET/FMF/1206 funds is well-worth the time and money spent.

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